

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-15 DOE-11 SOE-02 /087 W
-----102130 311652Z /43

P 311607Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7909
INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

UNCLAS MEXICO 01705

EO 11652: N/A
TAGS: PN, MX
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT LOPEZ PORTILLO RESPONDS TO QUESTION
ON MEXICAN ATTITUDE TOWARD PANAMA TREATY

1. IN JANUARY 28 DINNER WITH ASSOCIATED PRESS DIRECTORS,
MEXICAN PRESIDENT WAS QUESTIONED ABOUT MEXICO'S ATTITUDE
TOWARD PANAMA CANAL TREATY. FOLLOWING IS INFORMAL EMBASSY
TRANSLATION OF Q AND A WHICH APPEARED IN JANUARY 29 EDI-
TION OF EXCELSIOR.

2. QUESTION BY MR. W.S. MORRIS OF AUGUSTA, GEORGIA: MR.
PRESIDENT, I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU A QUESTION ON THE
PANAMA CANAL. THIS IS APPARENTLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPOR-
TANT SUBJECTS OF THE MOMENT IN OUR HEMISPHERE. SHOULD
THE UNITED STATES SENATE NOT RATIFY THIS TREATY, WHAT CON-
SEQUENCES WOULD THIS CAUSE THE UNITED STATES

WITH REFERENCE TO ITS RELATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICA? AND
SPECIFICALLY, WHAT WOULD BE THE CONSEQUENCES WITH RESPECT
TO RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO?

3. REPLY: WE LATIN AMERICANS WOULD BE GREATLY DISCOURAGED
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SHOULD THIS LOVELY EFFORT NOW BEING MADE BY PRESIDENT
CARTER TO FORMULATE A POLICY BETWEEN NORTH AMERICA AND
LATIN AMERICA BE FRUSTRATED. OF COURSE, RELATIONS BETWEEN
NORTH AMERICA AND LATIN AMERICA ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE
CASES OF PANAMA AND CUBA, AS IS FREQUENTLY BELIEVED IN THE
UNITED STATES; BUT IT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED THAT WE CON-
SIDER THE FIRST OF THESE TO BE VERY IMPORTANT BECAUSE A

QUESTION OF PRINCIPLES IS BEING DEBATED THERE. THE HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA IS THAT OF ITS DECOLONIZATION; IT IS AN EFFORT TO AFFIRM ITS SOVEREIGNTY; IT IS A STRUGGLE TO BE WHAT WE WANT TO BE, WITH TOTAL LIBERTY AND ON A PLANE OF EQUALITY.

4. ANY SITUATION WHICH REDUCES SOVEREIGNTY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF SELF-DETERMINATION CAUSES US GREAT PREOCCUPATION, CONSIDERING ALWAYS THE FACT THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE IN THE SAME SITUATION SHOULD THEY FIND THEMSELVES IN A POSITION SIMILAR TO THAT OF PANAMA.

5. FOR THIS REASON WHEN ANY U.S. NEWSPAPERMAN ASKS ME THIS QUESTION DURING AN IMPROVISED OR STRUCTURED INTERVIEW--AND ALL HAVE ASKED ME THIS QUESTION--I REPLY THAT H SHOULD POSE THIS QUESTION FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE: WHAT WOULD THEY WANT FOR THE UNITED STATES SHOULD IT FIND ITSELF IN THE SAME POSITION AS THE PANAMANIAN? THIS, OF COURSE, PRESUMES THAT IN THIS WORLD THERE SHOULD EXIST A FORCE WHICH COULD IMPOSE A SIMILAR SITUATION ON THE UNITED STATES.

6. THE ABOVE IS WITH REGARD TO GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS. NOW, WITH REFERENCE TO THOSE OF A PRACTICAL ORDER, I BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE GOOD WILL OF BOTH PRESIDENTS CARTER AND TORRIJOS, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE

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AT THIS TIME THE LATTER REPRESENTS THE INSTITUTIONAL CHANNEL FOR A SOLUTION; HE HAS BEHIND HIM THE MAJORITY OF HIS PEOPLE, AND WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT, PANAMANIAN YOUTH.

7. SHOULD ADVANTAGE NOT BE TAKEN OF THIS OPPORTUNITY, THE DISENCHANTMENT, I BELIEVE, COULD TURN MANY YOUNG PEOPLE INTO FANATICS. ALREADY IN RECENT DAYS ONE OF THEM IM-MOLATED HIMSELF, BURNED HIMSELF, PROTESTING THE CONDITIONS OF THE PACT. IMAGINE WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN SHOULD THIS DISENCHANTMENT BE FELT BY ALL PANAMANIAN YOUTH.

8. THE CANAL IS VULNERABLE, AND THERE COULD BE MANY POTENTIAL SUICIDES IN PANAMA. ADVANTAGE, THEREFORE, SHOULD BE TAKEN OF THIS INSTITUTIONAL POSSIBILITY TO RE-SOLVE THE PROBLEM. LUCEY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGREEMENTS, PRESS CONFERENCES, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, CANALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MEXICO01705
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780046-0356
Format: TEL
From: MEXICO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978014/aaaaactd.tel
Line Count: 109
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3b18c7e1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 feb 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3739337
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT LOPEZ PORTILLO RESPONDS TO QUESTION ON MEXICAN ATTITUDE TOWARD PANAMA TREATY
TAGS: SOPN, EWWT, PN, MX, US, (LOPEZ PORTILLO Y PACHECO, JOSE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3b18c7e1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014